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HFAC
SOLARZ

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO, January 25, 1984 at his office in Havana

SOLARZ: I've been on a long trip through South and Central America: Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico. Now I have come here to put it all together. I am seeking answers to some puzzling questions.

CASTRO: Just ask the questions or tell us what you have seen.

SOLARZ: This was my first trip to South America. I focused on political and economic questions, and found the experience very interesting. The social and economic crisis is creating political problems, especially in Brazil and Peru. Chile is in for a long hot winter. The Chileans have a curious custom. When summer comes, they call off their protest and go to the beach. Once this summer is over, the movement for democracy will continue.

CASTRO: So they strike during March and April.

SOLARZ: Yes, meanwhile they are at the beach.

CASTRO: Some Brazilians told me about a political rally they were planning. They had to wait until after Carnival. But 200,000 participated and called for direct elections.

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SOLARZ: I am interested in your reactions to events in Argentina--the collapse of the junta, the elections, and Alfonsin's emergence as President.

CASTRO: I think this is an important step forward. Recently I saw a Latin American film festival of historical documentaries here. I wish you could see them. I can't lend you the films, since they might be under contract. I asked that the prints be left here. There was a long and interesting documentary, "The Long Revolution." It depicted the rise, reforms and fall of Iragoyin (sp?), the first Peron period, military rule thereafter, then Peron again. What was really fascinating was the role of the masses of the people, struggling over major contradicitions. Sometimes the masses moving forward were the popular masses; sometimes they were reactionaries. The popular participation was very impressive. Now there is an opportunity, a new opportunity for the popular masses. Alfonsin got the support of the middle classes. The workers followed Peron's ideas. The people have squared accounts with the military. Incredible things happened in Argentina [in the 1970s]. Peron came back. Isabel was his vice-president and then succeeded him as president. That was a disaster. There were the death squads, a sinister group. They wielded power behind the throne. The Argentine people were looking for something besides the military and Peronism (which has a left, center,

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and right). They found Alfonsin, who was courageous and ran a good campaign. The Radicals won after forty years out of power.

SOLARZ: I met with Alfonsin. He's an impressive man. I told him that the atmosphere in Buenos Aires was like that in Washington in 1933. After a period of political oppression and economic decline, a leader with firmness and boldness has captured the heart of the nation. I think if an election were held now, Alfonsin would get sixty to seventy percent of the vote.

CASTRO: The history of Argenina is of one tragedy after another inthe midst of economic prosperity. Now there is the possibility of mass participation. The people won't be satisfied with crumbs. Alfonsin has two problems. First is the disappeared. It will be difficult task to please public opinion. There were supposedly 15,000 people missing. Many bodies are appearing every day. It's traumatic. But there is no-one in jail. Kamps (sp?), who bragged about killing 5,000, is now in jail. Bignone was not as responsible as Kamps, though he may be somewhat responsible. He presided over the transportation of the victims. I know the psychology of the masses, who will not forget. Alfonsin must find and try enough people. He risks disillusioning people. Why? They are discontent because the trials will be in military and not civilian courts.

SOLARZ: There is that concern, particularly among the human rights groups, like the Mothers of the Plaza del Maya, which are determined that justice be done. But Alfonsin has instituted appeals to civilian courts.

CASTRO: I think that there are thousands who can be blamed, who participated. The military was involved in large numbers. It would be necessary to try several thousands. After such an atrocious crime, trying eight to ten will not be enough.

SOLARZ: I think that is his plan. He has designated three categories of people: those who directed the dirty war; those who committed excesses in the carrying out their orders; and those who merely followed orders.

CASTRO: What about people who engaged in torture?

SOLARZ: They will be subject to prosecution.

CASTRO: What about those who committed murder.

SOLARZ: They will be subject to prosecution also.

CASTRO: I am looking from a distance. If he doesn't prosecute enough, the people won't be satisfied. We've had our own experience in this regard. There were cases of torture before the revolution, and people don't forget. After we came to power we convicted some counterrevolutionaries in Ascension for crimes against the people. Some of those convicted were shot at an execution, but some were only sentenced to 30 years in jail. There are presently some 200 still in

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jail. Recently, at the time of our twenty-fifth anniversary, I was asked to make an analysis to see how many might be released. We determined that 60 to 70 could be released (they can't go to the US or to Europe). These individuals were responsible for a number of killings in the area, and the relatives of the victims are still there. The murderers had prestige. They will become a political problem. The people don't forget.

I saw a picture today of Israelis demonstrating in Tel Aviv at the time of Helmut Kohl's visit. Even though he had nothing to do with the concentration camps, it was as if he had been wearing a Nazi uniform. People don't forget. I know the masses. The masses don't forget. The government in Argentina needs to go after a certain number of the military, or else the people will not be satisfied.

SOLARZ: There is another problem, the possibility that the campaign will go too far, provoking the military to protect its institutional integrity and seize power again. Now the army is demoralized, whipped, and beaten. But if they think that Alfonsin is moving toward convicting everyone in the army, they may strike back. It's a delicate situation.

CASTRO: That's true, but the longer Alfonsin waits the worse it will be. The army people will reorganize and act anyway. He has to strike now. There can be other repercussions: although there are only two Argentine military prisoners, the Brazilian military is raising the specter of revenge in Argentina as a pretext against democratization in Brazil. The same is true of Uruguay [and Chile--RB].

SOLARZ: I would like your opinion on the economic difficulties facing Alfonsin. Argentina has an external debt of $45 billion, the economy has declined in recent years, and living standards have fallen. After all this and the years of repression, there are now great hopes and expectations for an improvement, which are difficult to satisfy. In the short term, there is a risk of deterioration despite Alfonsin's merits, his intentions, and the austerity program. His image could deteriorate. These political ups and downs seem to be characteristic of Argentina. If the banks and the US government were willing to cooperate in renegotiating the debt, it would have positive repercussions, helping Alfonsin to meet external obligations, and in promoting general economic growth. The question is whether the bankers will forego profits for the sake of long-term progress.

CASTRO: It seems that the West is not so willing. The World Bank directors recently announced that it will take years for the Third World to recover. This has created a decline in lending, and the countries have to pay $20 billion above what was lent nominally [??: $20 billion above what the interest would be under normal conditions??].

SOLARZ: The debt crisis is a problem facing many countries in Latin America (for example, Brazil, Peru, Chile). I would have thought that a solution to the debt crisis would be good for both the debtor countries and the Western banks and governments. There is no way that

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countries like Brazil and Argentina can repay their debts at current rates of interest and survive.

CASTRO: First of all, I'm happy that a politician of your position has taken the opportunity to visit South America. The problem is more complex. Argentina and Peru have their own particular problems, but their fundamental problem is general and global. There is a crisis, the solution to which is illusive. But we need to recognize that the crisis exists. We need to get away from ideology and prejudice and look at the fact. The problem isn't just in Latin America, it's in the Third World and industrial world as well.

The symptoms of the crisis are obvious. In Quito recently, there was a conference attended by representatives of thirty Latin American countries. It issued a tough economic and political statement, equivalent to a declaration of war. While that protest was being made, Helmut Schmidt said in Brussells that Ronald Reagan's policies of deficits and high interest rates were more dangerous to the West than the Soviet threat. The Malaysian Prime Minister went to Williamsburg [??] and said that US policy was unbearable.

There is a world crisis. Each country is trying to save its skin. As the strongest country the United States is trying to impose a policy on the others. I have never seen a similar economic situation with regard to the United States. It's [policy] is universal, affecting and strangling every country. Moreover, with the arms race and Ronald Reagan's arms policy, there is unrest and the world feels strangled. The United States is getting blamed, though it shouldn't be blamed for everything. But US policy is causing desperation in both the Third World and the industrialized world. The debts cannot be paid at the prevailing interest rates. There needs to be a reduction in the debt.

SOLARZ: It is clear that the debtor countries cannot pay. But it is unrealistic to expect the banks and governments to write off the loans. How can we find an approach that is acceptable to both debtors and creditors?

CASTRO: My conclusion is the system is in crisis. We are witnessing a new phenomenon. Capital is no longer primarily investment capital. The share of loan capital is increasing. Finance capital is creating a crisis situation, a crisis of the capitalist system, of the world financial system and the world financial order. How can we get out of this crisis? Noone has the answer. But the crisis will lead to changes. There is no other way out.

Regarding Latin America, a North America concerned about the world's present and future must keep Latin America in mind. Latin America--both the democracies and the military dictatorships are in crisis. What solution is there for Peru and El Salvador. Venezuala has fallen into this situation in spite of its immense wealth. The economic and social situation in Mexico--even with all that oil--is terrible. The Mexicans tell me how bad the situation is. Venezuala is only getting $28 per barrel. In Brazil, the economic miracle is no more. There is a $95 billion debt and serious unemployment. Chile has

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an external debt of $20 billion. Peru doesn't know what to do. It only has $300 million in reserves. There is a tremendous crisis in Uruguay, and in Santo Domingo and Jamaica. Are the Cubans, the Marxist-Leninists of this continent, going to be blamed for all this trouble?

What way out is there? There must be changes, deep social changes. They are inevitable. American politicians have to think about the changes. They have to face them. The present is like the eighth month of a pregnancy. I don't know who will deliver the solution, but changes are inevitable. If I were an American politician I would not shut my eyes and look at ghosts. In Brazil, for example, there will be a strategic change. Brazil cannot be treated like Grenada.

SOLARZ: You're mentioning Brazil prompts me to ask an intruiging question. Why was there never a revolution in Brazil in spite of the genuine poverty and the military repression? In Central America, economic poverty, social inequality, and political repression have led to revolution. That's the only means of achieving progress. When poverty and inequality occur in a more open political system, revolution is less likely, because there are opportunities to work within the system. Why has there been no significant revolutionary movement in Brazil?

CASTRO: There wasn't a revolution in Chile in spite of Pinochet. There wasn't a revolution in Argentina despite the disappeared. And there hasn't been one in Brazil. In conjunction, the economy is still up [??].

SOLARZ: Argentina had the Montoneros. Chile has the MIR. But there was no revolutionary movement in Brazil.

CASTRO: Yes there was, but it was crushed. Change is a matter of life or death. These are long processes, but the objective conditions are there. We don't know which forces will promote the changes, but the changes will occur one way or another. The countries cannot continue the way they are. Consciousness is rising. Brazilians are demanding a direct election of the president. Chileans are mounting a mass movement after ten years, almost a general uprising against the system. They don't believe in [won't accept] repression anymore. In Peru, who created representative democracy? I've talked to traditional Latin American politicians. They don't think in the old terms any more. They think in revolutionary terms.

SOLARZ: Regarding Peru, does Sendero Luminso provide answers?

CASTRO: Sendero is a mystery to everyone. The phenomenon demonstrates that the economic and social crises is there, but not that Sendero will have the answers. Peru is a country where you have democratic politics and a social crisis. There is an elected president and chamber but they have no solutions to the problems. The problems will be solved by revolutionary movements. I have talked with Peruvian politicians, but never to Sendero. We've had no contact with Sendero.

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I've talked to traditional politicians from other countries. They think only revolution will deal with the profound social and economic problems.

SOLARZ: We must be talking to different politicians, or they are saying different things to you and to me. I talked with Barrantes and Villanueve in Peru. They say that there is a crisis, but they deal with it through democratic processes. There will be a new government in 1985. All Peruvian politicians are critical of Sendero Luminoso. They feel that the revolutionary path would be counterproductive.

CASTRO: When I talk of the revolutionary path, I don't mean the method of violence. I mean the conviction that profound changes are necessary in social, economic, and political systems. I don't mean to refer to Sendero and its approach.

SOLARZ: Are the Sendero people the Pol Pots of Latin America?

CASTRO: I believe Sendero is a strange group. I know its Maoist origins. It had sympathy for the Albanians in the late 1970s. From public information, we know of its violent methods. I don't have the information to say whether it's a Pol Pot-style movement. I don't know how they think. It's too early to label them. But Sendero is the expression of a social and economic crisis, interwoven with the character of the Peruvian people. Sendero doesn't make statements, and we have no relationship with it. It's the only revolutionary group with which we have no contacts.

SOLARZ: People in Peru say Sendero is as critical of Cuba as it is with the United States.

CASTRO: It's likely they would make that mistake.

SOLARZ: In Chile, there is tremendous pressure on the Pinochet government. There is a national consensus that Pinochet has to go. But there are two different approaches on how to achieve that end. On the one hand, the Democratic Alliance forces seek change through peaceful non-violence (demonstrations, general strikes, etc.). They have rejected the use of violence. On the other hand, the MIR uses the tactics of violence and terror to destabilize the government. Which approach do you think is more productive?

CASTRO: Both ways can help. They complement each other. The peaceful movement is strong and is winning over social sectors which are afraid of a violent revolution. The MIR has courage. It has faced Pinochet from the beginning and has produced many martyrs. The Left--the Socialists and Communists--has conducted the greatest resistance. The Christian Democrats coexisted for seven to eight years with the Pinochet regime. It was not until the crises deepened that the Christian Democrats were moved to active oppostion. We are happy that all are working together to overthrow Pinochet. Both ways are good.

SOLARZ: In the democracies of Latin America (Argentina, Peru,

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Colombia, Venezuala, and Brazil once the abertura is completed by elections), are the social and economic problems solvable by democratic governments or must they await revolutionary regimes?

CASTRO: The revolutions will not necessarily be like Cuba's. Nicaragua is trying to conduct revolution along different channels. They are going to convene elections. Their electoral and political system is different [from ours], though the aims are the same. Their solution is not like ours. Military regimes emerged as a defense against revolution when democracy was in crisis. Then the military was in crisis and there was a return to constitutional governments. Will they be able to solve the problem? The military in Peru tried to make social reforms to prevent the crisis but it was not capable enough. The Belaunde government is impotent. Can democracy solve the problems? [No.] What comes after? The military. You have an alternation between the military and democracy forever. Allende tried to make changes by a democratic regime but the United States would not let him. This situation will not go on forever. The people won't accept it. The traditional means won't solve the problems. Profound social and economic changes are necessary, either through peaceful means or violent revolution.

SOLARZ: Democratic governments may be unable to cope, and revolutionary governments may take power. But will they be able to solve the crisis if it's a consequence of the crisis of the world capitalist system. Will the revolutionary governments fail because they do not have control over their destiny?

CASTRO: That's a good point. It will depend on the countries. Some have resources. If they manage their resources well, they will not need assistance. If Cuba had the money Venezuala has, we could do great things. Argentina has energy, mineral, and agricultural resources. Brazil could solve its problems. Bolivia would need assistance. Chile is rich but it needs the management that revolutionary governments provide. The poorer countries will need comprehensive assistance.

The systems in North America and Western Europe will be there for a long period of time. There will be a rotation of governments between right and left endlessly. These changes can take place in the context of relative economic abundance. Your unemployed are not like the unemployed of Brazil and Chile. Your beggars are better off. Those in poverty [in the US] are reduced minorities. The poor in the Third World are the majority. The Western world has porblems: unemployment, deficits, inflation. Now is is fighting inflation at the expense of employment and services, but is reducing them from a high level. I talk to people from Portugal, Spain, and France. The problem of unemployment has driven them to anguish.

For the Western economies to work better, there need to be changes in the Third World, on which they are ultimately dependent. I remember a time that China was seen as mad. I thought that it would be a big market, that there was no reason for hostility on the part of the United States. Now the US and China are close. The United States will

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have to deal with the Third World in this way. It must face the necessary changes. Even though there are investments [by Western countries in the Third World], the Western countries will survive once the changes occur, just as Holland and Belgium survived without colonies (even though it was feared that they would not). There were similar fears about the consequences of the end of slavery. Someday imperialism will disappear, but the capitalist societies won't be ruined. They will be more prosperous when all work, produce, and consume. Where is the business if twenty million Brazilians are out of work? When will you stop thinking about the present as people in the past thought about slavery and colonies?

SOLARZ: But in the periods of slavery and colonialism, there was a conscious commitment to those systems. Do the rich countries have a commitment to keep Brazilians out of work? Brazil can't pay back the debt.

CASTRO: You are right that some countries--Sweden and Japan, for example--do not think like that. But the US Administration thinks like that and opposes politica, economic, and social changes. That is its traditional policy. It's a reality.

Take Africa as an example. Who brought the changes in Africa? It was the military, not the parties--in Ghana, Upper Volta, Nigeria, and Egypt. It's different from Latin America. Military revolutions have emerged in Africa. Maybe someday the Latin American militaries can be instruments of social change, if they are convinced that there is no way out and that changes are needed.

SOLARZ: I would like to turn now to Central America, a region that is in a serious crisis with unique characteristics. Central America is a more immediate problem for the United States and Cuba, one that is potentially more explosive. The Contadora group is undertaking an indigenous approach to the conlict in the hopes of reaching a negotiated settlement. Do you support the Contadora process and hope that it will produce concrete results and a reduction of tensions?

CASTRO: We have supported the Contadora group and appreciate its effort. But we are concerned about the way the policy has developed in the last few months. Salvador is the bone of contention and the core of the problem, not Nicaragua. Without a solution to the Salvador problem, there can be no solution in Central America. Lately, due to pressures, Contadora has ignored Salvador and not even mentioned it.

SOLARZ: At Panama, there was an agreement in principle on the reduction of tensions. If the Panama agreement leads to specific arrangements and concrete realities, it will be a significant accomplishment. The terms include democratic governments, inventory and then withdrawal of advisers, pledges of nonintervention, an inventory of military forces which will be the basis for establishing an equilibrium of forces, and verification of these actions. Translating these principles into reality will be difficult. It is not clear why Salvador must be solved to if such an agreement can be

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reached.

CASTRO: All these delcarations are general, abstract norms. They need to be translated into action. It all depends on what these provisions would mean for the United States. A non-agression pact between Nicaragua and Honduras won't solve anything while the US retains a military presence in Honduras.

SOLARZ: The Panama agreement calls for the withdrawal of advisers and the abolition of bases. If the United States insists on its presence in Honduras, there will be no agreement.

CASTRO: Well, if the US is willing to withdraw that changes matters. Does the agreement presuppose an end to US advisers and weapons to El Salvador? How can Nicaragua and Salvador reach an agreement while this US military involvement continues?

SOLARZ: The agreement would require that the US withdraw its advisers in Salvador and Honduras, and that Nicaragua send home the advisers there. It would require that no country have foreign bases on its soil. Nicaragua would not send arms to the FMLN, the US would not send arms to El Salvador, and Cuba and the Soviet Union would not send arms to Nicaragua. Contadora calls for an equilibrium of forces. Obviously, Costa Rica has none to reduce, but the other countries can. I discussed with D'Escoto the Nicaraguan proposal that it not supply arms to the FMLN in return for an end to the supply of US arms to Salvador. That idea was superceded in the Panama agreement, which does not call for a prohibition on such arms supply relationships. It calls for an equilibrium of forces. Presumably, if a formula can be found that is agreeable to all, that might permit each country to receive arms from other countries as long as it did not alter the equilibrium.

CASTRO: There's a trap there. There is a moral implication that Nicaragua will give up the right to help the Salvadoran revolutionaries fighting a genocidal regime, while El Salvador gets US arms. That constitutes a betrayal of the FMLN by Nicaragua.

Concerning an equilibrium, Nicaragua's potential enemy is not the other countries of Central America but the United States. What kind of equilbrium can exist there? If I were the Nicaraguans, I wouldn't worry about the forces of Honduras or El Salvador. The problem is a US invasion. For Nicaragua to give up arms to the FMLN while the US supplies arms to El Salvador is unacceptable.

The bulk of the FMLN's weapons are gotten in battle. In theoretical terms, however, such an agreement would demoralize Nicaragua [?? Should it be "the FMLN"?]. Nicaragua made a great concession when it said it was willing to stop supplying arms if other countries would too. That is a fair and just approach.

SOLARZ: I had not understood that Nicaragua as willing to forego weapons from other countries. It was my understanding that it would abstain from supplying arms to the FMLN but retain the right to get arms itself. Is Nicaragua willing to stop receiving arms from other

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countries if Salvador doesn't get any?

CASTRO: Yes. That is a great concession, because the US is their threat. They propose a cessation of weapons transfers and a withdrawal of forces.

SOLARZ: Let's be practical. It is reasonable to expect countries to stop supplying arms to other parties within Central America. It is not reasonable to expect countries to cut themselves off from arms from outside the region. Otherwise they could not maintain their military establishments. What can be done is to preserve an equilibrium.

CASTRO: I think that could be done for a period of time, for one or two years. But Nicaragua, in spite of the fact that it sees the US as its enemy, was willing to [stop supplying arms to the FMLN]. That implies that other countries should not send weapons to the other Central American countries.

SOLARZ: You make the important point that the US is a threat to Nicaragua. There is no way that a country of 3 million people can balance a country of 220 million. There is one solution to this imbalance: a US-Nicaraguan agreement, as a complement to Contadora, whereby the United States would pledge to not interfere in Nicaragua's internal affairs, and to not provide arms to groups of insurgents in Nicaragua. That seemed acceptable to the Sandinistas. Do you think it's acceptable?

CASTRO: The contras are no danger to the Sandinistas. I wouldn't mind the US supplying the contras. I would have confidence in the Sandinistas. Let the contras have all the weapons they want. I wouldn't make that a bargaining point, because Nicaragua and Salvador aren't comparable. In Salvador, the conflict is an internal war; in Nicaragua it's external aggression.

SOLARZ: Nicaragua's problem with the contras isn't the threat per se. The Sandinistas do pay a price in containing them in terms of money and mobilization. They are better off without the problem. If we stopped the arms, the contras would wither away.

CASTRO: Would the US betray their moral commitment to the contras?

SOLARZ: We have a record of betraying our commitments. I agree that the US is the main threat to Nicaragua. A pledge on our behalf not to intervene in Nicaragua's internal affairs and to end aid to the contras would be similar to the pledge the US made to Cuba after the Missile Crisis of 1962. That has worked for twenty years, and commitment to the Sandinistas could work too. But even if the US made such a commitment, establishing an equilibrium of forces would still be a problem. If Nicaragua decided to develop a military capability vis-a-vis the United States, it would be a cause for concern on the part of other Central American countries. Is there a formula for reducing all forces so there are no perceived threats?

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CASTRO: The theory that Nicaragua might attack a neighbor is absurd. It would be suicide. If the Sandinista leaders go mad, they might launch an invasion of Costa Rica, but they would have no support. It would be a pretext for an American intervention and the destruction of the Nicaraguan Revolution. To reach an general agreement is simple: find a negotiated solution to the Salvador issue, and the other issues will take care of themselves. Nicaragua will not pay the high price of having the Salvadoran revolution crushed. The revolutionaries are strong. They won't surrender. They may resist if they are cut off. Look first for a solution to the Salvador problem, and that will open the road for Contadora.

SOLARZ: I want to talk in a minute about a political settlement in Salvador, about which I've thought a great deal (though probably not as much as you). But I do want to pursue the point of the equilibrium of forces. Even if the Salvador question is solved, the problem would still exist. I agree that it would be crazy for Nicaragua to invade Costa Rica. The 82nd Airborne would be on the way in twenty-four hours. Thus there is no military threat. But there is a political problem. Can you expect that the military authorities in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatamala to be willing to accept an agreement permitting Nicaragua to have 50,000 soldiers under arms when they have 20,000 to 25,000? They would insist on a reduction of Nicaragua's forces.

CASTRO: The amount of men you can count on for a military struggle is not a military problem, it's a political problem, a question of people being willing to take up a gun. If Honduras has an army of 20,000, it's because that's the number of people willing to fight. Another solution is to give guns to the workers and the campesinos. I would be praying that you give weapons to them. That's a kind of equilibrium I can agree with. In Nicaragua there is patriotism, revolutionary fervor, and revolutionary spirit. Those are missing in the other countries.

SOLARZ: If there were a Contadora agreement, with provisions for no foreign advisers, no foreign bases, non-intervention, plus a US promise not to aid the contras, why would Nicaragua need such a large miltiary force?

CASTRO: It wouldn't.

SOLARZ: Would the Sandinistas be willing to reduce their forces?

CASTRO: It makes sense.

SOLARZ: If that is possible, then a Contadora agreement is possible. If an agreement is possible on the security and political issues and on US-Nicaraguan relations, then why is a continuation of the El Salvador conflict an obstacle?

CASTRO: If I were the Sandinistas, I would feel in a difficult moral position in having to sacrifice the Salvadoran revolutionaries.

SOLARZ: Haven't they already done that in effect, by pledging not

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to supply arms, which the FMLN allegedly doesn't need anyway? Why is there such a moral sacrifice?

CASTRO: For such an agreement, there needs to be simple reciprocity on the part of the United States [to end its military supply of the Salvadoran armed forces]. I am saying what I would do if I were in the Sandinistas' situation. Why is the US demanding an end to the supply of arms [by Nicaragua to the FMLN] if it is not happening?

SOLARZ: I've been to Nicaragua three times. The first two times it was clear that the Sandinistas did not intend to have Costa Rican-style elections or to give up power. This time [three days ago] I spoke to Carlos Nunez. . . .

CASTRO: And you asked about giving up power if they lost, and he said yes. They told me about it. "If we lose the elections, we are not worthy to remain in power." That was a very sincere response.

SOLARZ: I thought Nunez handled himself very well.

CASTRO: They were very pleased with your visit.

SOLARZ: Our ambassador was with me. He said that this was the most significant discussion he's heard yet from the Sandinistas. I will report on my conversation when I return to Washington, and I hope it will have an impact. What Nunez said was meant to assuage the United States and the other countries of Central America. Do you think it will facilitate progress in Contadora?

CASTRO: Nunez spoke logically and candidly. You said that before they were unwilling to have a Costa-Rica style election. Now they have decided to hold classical, traditional elections--very strange elections as in Peru, Venezuala--with a direct vote for president. This is a great challenge. I think their approach is correct, and they need not fear the challenge. I think they have the people's support and will win. It is a concession.

SOLARZ: A fundamental change.

CASTRO: It will become a weapon against the United States.

SOLARZ: My question is, what accounts for this change?

CASTRO: I think a whole set of factors are at work. The Sandinistas face threats and aggression. They need the support from Latin America, Europe, the Socialist International, and public opinion. They have taken three steps: increased their ability to resist aggression; made initiatives internationally; and taken a number of measures domestically to increase unity (the amnesty, and a more moderate position toward the Church and toward business). This represents a defense of their revolution. The Sandinistas can do this because they have the support of the majority of the population. The US made a mistake regarding the Sandinistas. If you had left them

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alone, without an embargo, sabotage, and support for the contras, they would have had to face their revolution alone. They would be weaker, with more problems to face in the economic and social sphere. Having been attacked from the outside, they were able to mobilize public and national sentiment and have grown stronger as a result. Who better than I knows the domestic uses to which external aggression can be put? The United States is strengthening the Nicaraguan revolution. External threats and aggression increase patriotism, and other problems are forgotten.

SOLARZ: What you're saying is that Ronald Reagan in the the tenth member of the Directorate.

CASTRO: Yes, in a way.

SOLARZ: Or the Sandinistas have a mole in the White House. Can the Sandinista revolution survive without the spread of revolution?

CASTRO: Yes, the spread of revolution is not necessay.

SOLARZ: Do the Sandinistas believe that?

CASTRO: You asked me for my opinion. Look at our situation. We are not in danger if other countries have arms. We are not thinking of invading other countries. We are tranquil. But when invasion is a threat, sometimes revolutionaries go crazy. Take Coard for example. He started out being ninety percent genius and ten percent crazy but ended up ten percent genius and ninety percent crazy!

SOLARZ: Let's turn to the political situation in Salvador. The government of El Salvador wants the guerrillas to lay down their arms and participate in elections. As long as the death squads exist that is an absurd proposal. On the other hand, it is unrealistic to expect the government to accept an interim government with power sharing. What is your formula for a political solution?

CASTRO: I think this is the key. Regarding El Salvador, the revolutionaries are quite strong. In 1981 there were only a few hundred of them, without experience or unity. Now there are thousands with great experience, with a mystic (?) fighting experience. They are invincible. The government forces cannot defeat them. The Kissinger Report said there were about nine to ten thousand of them. That's about right, but they have experience. Why hasn't the government fallen? The government is like a coat on a hanger. As long as the hanger of US support continues, the coat will continue hanging; once the hanger is removed, the coat collapses. If there is an American intervention, however, the war won't be over. The FMLN would hav support and national spirit.

SOLARZ: There is another problem. If the guerrillas are on the verge of victory. . . .

CASTRO: I know what you going to say. An imminent victory would

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lead to US intervention. But Ronald Reagan would not be able to suppress the resistance. On the other hand, why do the Salvadoran revolutionaies now want to negotiate if they can win the war? They know that US intervention would be very costly and destructive, but they are not afraid to fight if it's necessary. It is not easy to reach a conclusion about the need to talk. The Cubans and Sandinistas have be talking a long time. But the Salvadorans are aware of the costs of a US intervention. They are now more unified and better equipped. I haven't spoken to the leaders recently. The five leaders have been in Salvador for awhile. That's good and bad. They would be willing to have a negotiated solution.

The government forces are demoralized. Many people in the army are in favor of not having the elections. They are angry with the elections. They regard them as a disaster which is dividing the country and polarizing the forces between D'Aubisson and Duarte. They don't have sympathy for either candidate. They want to cancel the elections, form a provincial government, and start negotiations with the guerrillas. The US is probably aware of this. The military is frustrated with the elections. A political settlement is more likely. The military is conscious of how much the situation has deteriorated materially and psychologically.

SOLARZ: I have just come from Salvador. I talked with Vides Casanova, with Blandon, with Bustillo, with the heads of the security forces. I didn't pick up a hint of this. I spoke to American military advisers, to regional commanders of the armed forces, to General Woerner, and to our intelligence people in Washington. This was not suggested by anyone.

CASTRO: I cannot present the evidence on this, but remember what I have said. I wouldn't fabricate it. You'll find out.

SOLARZ: If so, ...

CASTRO: I don't mean all. . . . People in key positions would not dare say this to you or me.

SOLARZ: If the military keeps this to themselves and the elections proceed, what are the prospects of a settlement on the terms the FMLN has put forward, since they are strong?

CASTRO: If D'Aubisson wins, I don't know. If Duarte wins, it's perhaps more likely. But the situation is complicated. If the reports of polarization are true--that there is an intense, divisive struggle--then the government is weakened. Disagreements mean that the Constituent Assembly hasn't worked. The military is terrified with the prospect of elections. I don't know if the same thing will happen in Nicaragua [??]. I know what the FMLN thought two years ago. Perhaps it would be more diplomatic to appear more flexible. I can't talk on their behalf, but I don't think they will want less than a provisional government, with positions and not laying down their arms. The Janauary 1982 proposal was a strategic--not tactical--move, demonstrating their desire for reforms, for guarantees for the people,

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for elections, and for a mixed economy. It suggested that more radical change would be postponed.

SOLARZ: There has been one important change recently that may have had an effect on the FMLN's attitude. That is the Administration's intention to ask for a substantial increase in military aid. In that context, why should the government forces fold it they think they are going to get more money?

CASTRO: They are demoralized. They can't get people to fight. It happened here in Cuba. Even though Batista's army was larger than the Salvadoran forces today, it got demoralized. And the FMLN is larger and more experienced than we were in 1959.

SOLARZ: There seem to be two options for a political settlement. The first is an interim government which would create conditions for the holding of elections after several months. The second is a provisional government that would not hold elections for several years. Which of these options does the FMLN want? Is it willing to accept power sharing with elections soon?

CASTRO: We need to clarify that the Salvadoran military is not speaking of power sharing. It is talking of cancelling the elections, forming a provisional government, and beginning negotiations. There is no easy answer to your question. I don't know how the revolutionaries think. From my point of view, a provisional government should delay elections for a while so it can institute reforms. If elections occur before conditions are right, the old forces reemerge.

SOLARZ: But there is another possibility. Vice-President Bush has told the government of El Salvador that it has to crack down on the death squads. This is a very significant development. For two years, while 30,000 people were killed, Ronald Reagan did nothing. But once the administration realized that Congress would not provide the money, they had no choice. Bush's intervention may not work. But if it is successful, it opens up the possibility of a political settlement based not on power sharing but on elections with specified guarantees.

CASTRO: I don't think the revolutionaries would accept that. Elections aren't just elections. They require organizations, parties, and certain machinery. The FMLN is fighting now. It can't change so fast. That's unrealistic.

SOLARZ: I would like to turn now to US-Cuban relations. How desirable would normalization be?

CASTRO: Normalization would be desirable, but it is improbable with Ronald Reagan as president. His mentality is one of promises and threats. We do not trust his sincerity. This was obvious concerning Grenada. I sent a message to the United States on the Saturday before the invasion. The reply, on Tuesday, informed us of the attack after it had already started. Then there was another message regarding the landing of the 82nd Airborne, after it occurred. We do not trust

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Reagan. He is not serious. Even until 1988 we will not trust him.

SOLARZ: You have said that revolution cannot be exported or prevented. Would a United States promise to normalize relations and lift the embargo and a Cuban promise to not actively support (that is, provide material assistance to) revolutionary movements an acceptable basis for negotiation?

CASTRO: Up until now, we have had a militant attitude regarding revolutionary movements. This is not a question of doctrine but of practicality. Blockaded as we have been, we have no choice but to fight. There has been a change: what was previously a total commitment is now only partial. Relations have improved. We would pursue norms of mutual respect such as we have with Mexico. Our activities have declined and our attitude is less militant. Even though we want revolutions, there is no need to accelerate the process. Revolution cannot be exported or prevented. It is due to objective factors. We have a consistent policy of peaceful coexistence based on principles of international relations. The only possible exception would be support for South African patriots. In answer to your question, we would abide by the principles of international relations and not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. In the past, we have responded to actions taken against us--the blockade, counterrevolutionary activities. We felt an obligation to do so.

SOLARZ: Is it all right for me to say publicly what you have just told me?

CASTRO: It depends on how you say it. It is better to keep it off-the-record because of the press treatment.

SOLARZ: What if I said that normalization on such a basis was possible?

CASTRO: If you put it in terms of an absoluted respect for non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, it's okay.

SOLARZ: Concerning the people who came in the Mariel exodus, some are technically excludable under US immigration law. Could you take them back?

CASTRO: That would have to be dealt with in the context of normalized relations. But it is not a precondition. The United States demanded unilaterally that we accept them, like a precondition.

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SOLARZ: In Cuba there are a number of political prisoners. If the US accepted them, would you release them?

CASTRO: Once we released 2,000 of such prisoners, thinking there was a commitment to take them. But the United States didn't accept them. Let's wait until the Democrats are in power.

[Solarz then raised the case of two Cuban Jews, surnamed Mitrani, whose application to leave Cuba had been stalled inexplicably. Castro promised that the authorities would look into the case.]

CASTRO: We once released a number of Americans who were in jail here on drug charges. Then the US government mounted a narcotics-related propaganda campaign against us. Now we won't release such people even if we are asked.

SOLARZ: Rest assured that I will never ask you to release a drug dealer.

CASTRO: We solved the problem of highjackings but the US has never paid us back.

[Solarz then asked Castro to consider a proposal brought by Bernie Nussbaum for an American chess club to come and play in Cuba. Castro promised to do so.]

CASTRO: What's going to happen to all the money the Kissinger Commission is asking? I think it will be stolen.

SOLARZ: Before it can be stolen, the money has to be authorized and appropriated. But I seriously doubt that such a large sum will be approved by the Congress.

CASTRO: I have often thought that if I were in the unpopular position the United States is in, I would stop being the gendarme of the world and allow the world to develop. The arms race is crazy: why invest money in it? Why can't the United States accept the changes? Why not give the money to countries that can use it? We are a leader in the field of public health. We are already sending health workers overseas. Our children have access to pediatric intensive care units. But look at our limited resources. We are not an oil-producing country. We are graduating professors but not all are employed (some are teaching and some are studying). Why is the United States so afraid of Cuba? The problem is in the type of relations that the US has with a country like ours. The US wants to buy other countries. It is only the revolutionary countries will not be bought.

SOLARZ: Cuba has made a number of accomplishments in the last twenty-five years. Have there been any failures in the revolution?

CASTRO: We have made mistakes, due to our ambitious desire to jump over stages of development. We have rectified those mistakes. We have accomplished more than we expected. The mood in the country is good. We have 4.5 percent growth in 1983. We have good distribution.

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NUSBAUM: Do you think it was wise for the Soviet Union to break off the nuclear arms talks?

CASTRO: That was the least they could do. Remember how the United States felt when the Soviets put forty-two missiles in Cuba. The Soviet reaction to the placement of over five hundred missiles in Western Europe should be no surprise. Not to break off the talks would have been to play into Ronald Reagan's hand. Sixty percent of people polled [in the US?] thought that not enough had been done [to reach an agreement ??].

The United States gets nervous with political changes. It feels an obligation to buy those countries (Cuba and Nicaragua for example). Why can't the US have relations with countries which have had revolutions on the basis of mutual respect? You have bought Egypt. Relations with China are good after years of threats. Why not with other socialist countries? Why does the US want to be a gendarme? Why not give the world to the Soviet Union?

SOLARZ: Has Cuba reduced its troops in Ethiopia?

CASTRO: Off the record: we feel that the number of troops in Ethiopia were no longer necessary and have tried to reduce them. We have transfered them to Angola, due to aggression from South Africa.

SOLARZ: I understand that you met with leaders of ARDE. Did anything come of it?

CASTRO: The meeting occurred at their request. It took place at the time that US actions in Central America were intensifying and that the FDN was attacking. They wanted to make contact with the Sandinistas. We told the Sandinistas, but they didn't trust the contacts and made a decision not to have talks.

SOLARZ: What do you think of Eden Pastore?

CASTRO: He does not have a good political attitude. He's unstable. He's a caudillo. He is courageous but like a computer. In 1979 he was calculating about the future. Then he went to Guatamala on a Che-like mission. He ended up as a counterrevolutionary.

SOLARZ: What about Napoleon Duarte?

CASTRO: I don't know him personally. Politically I don't like him.

SOLARZ: What would have happened had the US not invaded Grenada?

CASTRO: Grenada would have been isolated from all the revolutionary movements of the world. They would have gotten no help. They would not have been able to sustain themselves in power. Coard and Austin destroyed the revolution. As for Cuba, we would have finished the airport, as we promised to do, and then provided no more

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help. Our statement at the time of the coup was tough.

SOLARZ: I had mixed feelings about Grenada. I believe that it was a violation of international law. I spoke out against it, which was not very popular. On the other hand, I have the impression that the majority of the Grenadan people welcomed the US intervention.

CASTRO: They had undergone tremendous trauma because of the killing. Their nationalistic feeling is not well developed. The reacted to the killing of Bishop. We will have to see how they feel about the US intervention later.

That doesn't excuse the United States. It was an easy victory. The US action was understandable after Vietnam, Iran, and Beirut. Reagan's action in Grenada can be presented as a political victory. But what did he gain? What could he do vis-a-vis Nicaragua or Cuba? We are stronger because of Grenada. We have half a million more people. . . .[??] When Hitler went into Austria and Czechoslovakia, the German people were proud. Hitler used patriotism effectively.

SOLARZ: Have you met Andropov?

CASTRO: Yes. He is a serious-minded person. He is composed and well prepared. He was the best selection possible.

CASTRO: We did as much as possible to help Carter. The Iranians are to blame for Reagan's victory. They first knocked out Kennedy and then Carter. I think that perhaps Kennedy would have been a better candidate. Carter is not blameable for the hostages. We made gestures. The Mariel issue was solved. Prisoners were released unilaterally. We sent back highjackers, which we had not done before. US-Cuban relations were much better with Carter. We cannot deal with Ronald Reagan. We are willing to wait for one year or five years. We do not have illusions.

[Castro then proposed that Solarz undertake a secret mission (with the approval of the State Department and Vides Casanova) to meet with the leaders of the FMLN, to hear their views directly. Solarz said he would consider it.]

[The conversation concluded at 10:45 p.m.]

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